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April 2017 No 153

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Photo: Ray Archer





# A 100% MOMENT

*Gautier Paulin Wins the MXGP of Europe at Valkenswaard*



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# COMING TO GET YA...

Photo by Cudby/Shepherd

You could argue that control of 2017 AMA Supercross has already slipped through Ryan Dungey's fingers with two wins to Eli Tomac's nine this season but defeat at Salt Lake City saw the champion trail another for the first time since January. There is only 3 points in it with 50 left to win in New Jersey and Las Vegas and with the swirl of rumours that Ryan could consider thumbing the kill-switch for the final time in 2017 then the desire to fire back must be high. Whatever the outcome Supercross is nothing short of unmissable









# OVER IT...

Marc Marquez knew that COTA was the place to experiment with the limit on his '17 RCV and the current set-up, and the champion scuffed some dedicatory boots and helmet paint doing so during the third round of MotoGP. Come Sunday and he was unbeatable for a fifth success in a row, meaning the Texans are either in complete awe or are quite tired of the #93 showing the quickest trajectory around the spectacular track. Events in the USA were also juicy for the championship standings, even at this early stage

Photo by CormacGP



# TWO FOR ONE LINE...

Gautier Paulin ruled Valkenswaard last weekend but Tony Cairoli and Tim Gajser are already squaring up for a duel at the top of the MXGP standings. Almost a generation apart and split by eleven years there is still much that's similar between the KTM and Honda riders, not least a formidability that not many can match...at the moment

Photo by Ray Archer











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OVER TO YOU





# **RED BULL GRAND PRIX OF THE AMER**

## **COTA • APRIL 23rd**

**MotoGP winner: Marc Marquez, Honda**

**Moto2 winner: Franco Morbidelli, Kalex**

**Moto3 winner: Romano Fenati, Honda**

By Neil Morrison  
Blog by David Emmett  
Photos by CormacGP

# **LONE STAR IN TEXAS**





ICAS

MotoGP USA





**T**he winter of worry was all for nothing. Or so it appears, as Valentino Rossi leads the MotoGP world championship once again, just three races into 2017. The veteran Italian came to Austin with a “score to settle”, after the painful memories at the Circuit of Americas a year ago, which had him forever scrambling in the championship fight. Not so this time around.

All weekend, Rossi was in the mix. While he didn't possess the outright pace of Marquez and Viñales, a front row start and a fighting second place finish show he has ably overcome the front-end issues in corner entry that carried over from preseason into Qatar. Not since 1949 – the year of the premier class' inception – has a rider this old looked down at the rest of the field from the very top. “It's a big surprise especially for us because after the test we were quite desperate,” he said after Sunday's race. “I think that the problem was for me and for my team that we need more time for understand this bike, the way to ride and the way to set it up. But the bike has something positive, especially at the end of the races I'm able to push, to be strong. In fact, in Argentina with Cal [Crutchlow] and here with Dani [Pedrosa] I can attack.”

That attack for second place came three laps from the flag, and as with his move on Crutchlow in the previous race, carried a sense of inevitability. You can always rely on Rossi making his presence felt in the closing laps.

A third-straight podium pushes him six points clear of young team-mate Maverick Viñales, setting him up for the European season very nicely. “We have just to enjoy the moment,” he said. “Is already good like this. We go back in Europe and now arrive a very good part of the championship because have Jerez, Le Mans, Mugello, Barcelona, Assen where for me is a great feeling to race there because are tracks that give to me fantastic memories, are very enjoyable with the Moto GP, and the atmosphere is the real MotoGP world championship.”

There was a sprinkling of mischief too, after he found himself touring on the racing line in qualifying, with Viñales fast approaching. Both riders dismissed the incident as nothing more than a racing incident. “It's something that can happen,” the young Catalan said. But, as he watched Viñales swat aside all before him in his first five months in the team, this was a timely reminder of Rossi making his presence felt.

In his 21st season of competition at world level, another championship charge beckons.





MotoGP USA


















A MotoGP rider in an orange and white Honda livery is leaning into a turn on a racetrack. The rider is wearing a blue and white helmet and is positioned on the left side of the frame. The track surface is dark asphalt with visible tire marks. A red and white curb is visible on the right side of the track. The background is a blurred racetrack with a red and white curb.

Relief for Honda as the Spanish duo set the pace and led every lap of the third Grand Prix of the season. Will that potential rise again on the relatively short layout of Jerez?













A great race for fourth place was won by Cal Crutchlow but a second top five finish for Zarco drew yet more admiration; the Frenchman had been third and second at COTA in Moto2 the two previous seasons







# THE ONE THAT GOT AWAY?

This could have been the one. The one in which Maverick Viñales asserted himself on the MotoGP championship for real, potentially amassing not just another win, but striking a stake into the heart of Marc Marquez's own title hopes, around a circuit the reigning champ has legitimately come to call his own over the past four years...

As a breathless qualifying attested, this wasn't to be another Marquez whitewash. On Saturday evening, the reigning champion was sure of it. Viñales too. Yet in the end for the young Yamaha hopeful this would be the one that got away. The race was no more than four minutes old when Viñales' hopes of victory came undone. A front-end tuck over the bumpy turn 18 was enough to scupper not only his 100 percent record in Movistar blue, but his championship advantage too.

Having become the first rider sporting the Yamaha crest to score an season opening double-salvo since Wayne Rainey 27 years before, Viñales had

the chance to match the feat of another American and brand legend – Kenny Roberts Senior – by winning the first three. Such feats bring with them a certain weight.

Speaking after, the 22-year old was at a loss to explain what had gone wrong. "I'm like you now. I don't know," he said. Without wishing corporate interests in mind, Viñales merely hinted the medium compound front tyre was the cause. "I know the front tyre was not as good as this morning. On the left side I had some warnings at the start of the second lap." Not the first time, and certainly not the last a rider has pointed the finger of blame at the rubber, which begs

the question: was this a first chink in the armour, a mistake brought on by an over-zealous approach? And a rider subsequently jockeying to cover up his mistake?

There can be no denying Viñales had attacked the weekend as though he had been personally affronted by Marquez's unabated success in Texas. What better venue to prove his newfound might than the venue that had played host to four straight Marquez romps?

From his post-race comments in Argentina, it was clear this was a weekend Viñales had circled on his calendar to state his case as the worthy successor to his Catalan elder. Never had a rider come so close to Marquez at this circuit through free practice. And while his five-month Yamaha stint has been an unqualified success thus far, Viñales' ability to start in the same vein as Marquez or predecessor Jorge Lorenzo could be one of the areas marked 'in need of improvement.' Marquez knows as



By Neil Morrison



much and it could be said his fall in Argentina was his own bid to exploit his compatriot's weakness. The third in an ever-arching series of right bends, turn 18 sports a newly laid ripple in the middle, brought about by the high downforce of Formula 1 cars. Marquez had spoken of the need to find a new line through there on Friday. Not only had it claimed Marquez and Jorge Lorenzo in free practice. Four others came a'cropper there across the weekend, suggesting it is entirely plausible that Viñales was applying too much pressure early on after a mediocre start.

Yet watching the crash, it's hard to disagree he did little wrong. Triple world champion Rainey backed up Viñales' claim. "It was a strange crash," he said, having watched Sunday's events unfold from the Movistar Yamaha garage. "It didn't look like he was off line. It didn't look like he hit any bumps. It just looked like it washed out. For him to make a mistake you'd have thought everyone would have seen it. But I didn't really see a mistake." Team

boss Massimo Meregalli echoed this: "We have checked the data and there's nothing strange or different from what he has done since Friday," he said, backing up his rider's words.

Yes, he may be slightly weak in the early laps, but Viñales rarely panics. On Saturday he had spoken of rarely taking the M1 to its limits around the 20-corner track. A day later and he insisted he had got away with pushing Suzuki's GSX-RR harder through 2016. "Last year, in 18 races, I just crashed in Argentina. All the other tracks was pushing even more than this year. I was more on the limit," he said.

A Michelin spokesman said there were no signs the medium compound front he had used was at fault. But there have been murmurings on more than one occasion that two tyres of the same compound can react in radically different ways. At Misano a year ago, for instance.

Over the offseason, Andrea Dovizioso had complained of

similar issues too. And as Saturday morning's crash-fest demonstrated, changes in track temperature can significantly affect the working performance of the rubber. A hike of 18 degrees between warm-up and the race may also have played its part.

In truth, we may never know the true cause of Viñales' fall. And while it not only robbed us of a spectacle toward the front, and the Movistar man his chance at delivering a body blow to his nearest rival, there was enough in Viñales' weekend performance to suggest this was no more than an unfortunate blip. Around Marquez's favourite track, even entertaining the idea of winning was a kind of achievement, and saw him returning to Europe with an emboldened sense of nobility.







MotoGP USA



Marquez was supreme once more on Austin asphalt...but also U.S. soil generally. Including efforts in Moto2 and Indianapolis the Catalan is now undefeated in his last eleven appearances in the USA. At COTA he has now racked half a decade of sweeping Pole and victory...



# DON'T LOOK FAR FOR THE NEW STAR...

Switching classes is never easy. When riders move from one category to another, no one is really sure how they will adapt to the demands of their new environment. A new bike which is heavier, more powerful, different tyres, different team, a new crew chief to get to know, and to try to find an understanding with, all this and more means moving up is far more than just a matter of getting on a motorcycle and riding it as fast as possible. Some riders adapt really well, quickly getting their heads around a new challenge. Others fall flat, unable to modify their skill set to the demands of a different type of bike. Most take their time to learn the ropes, getting better as they get more races under their belts. The really good ones are fast right out of the gate, beating expectations every time they swing a leg over their new machines.

The trouble for team and factory bosses is that it is almost impossible to tell how any specific rider is going to turn out. Results in one class do not always accurately reflect a rider's potential once he climbs on a bigger, more powerful bike. "You need to be a bit lucky, sometimes," Alberto Puig told me earlier this year. Given the wealth of talent Puig has discovered in his career – Casey Stoner, Dani Pedrosa, Toni Elias, Bradley Smith, and many more – he is luckier than most.

So it should come as no surprise that the incredible performance by Johann Zarco in his first three races in MotoGP has shocked everyone who watches MotoGP. Not just the fans at home, but the so-called experts, the people who are supposed to know about these things. In Austin, I spoke to senior figures in a MotoGP factory, a MotoGP team, and a Moto2 squad, and all three said the same thing: We didn't expect this. To be honest, neither did I.

Of course, the fact that we should be so surprised at the

first rider to win two Moto2 championships should do well in MotoGP probably says more about us than it does about Johann Zarco. But it is hard to know just how strong a particular year in Moto2 is, and how strong the opposition a specific rider faced was. You only really understand that in retrospect, which doesn't help if you are a team manager looking to sign a rider for next year.

Just how good is Johann Zarco? I cannot remember a rookie entering the class and leading the first six laps of his debut race.



By David Emmett



Zarco escaped and was putting time into the leaders. A group consisting of Andrea Dovizioso, Marc Márquez, Andrea Iannone, Maverick Viñales and Valentino Rossi: big names to be beating in your first race. Zarco crashed after six laps, obviously overreaching himself, but even then, there are few rookies who led a race and crashed out while doing so.

In Argentina, his second outing, he fought his way forward from fourteenth on the grid to finish the race in fifth, spending much of the race battling with Dani Pedrosa, until Pedrosa crashed out. Fifth is not where rookies are expected to finish in their second race, unless they happen to be on a factory bike. In Austin, Zarco was fifth once again, narrowly beaten by Cal Crutchlow (in his seventh year in the premier class, and with two MotoGP victories to his name). He is currently seventh in the championship, with five factory riders and Cal Crutchlow ahead of him.

Zarco is a satellite rider racing on last year's machine. Yet he is clearly beating the other satellite

riders, and a good many factory riders too. In many ways, his performance so far has reminded me of Casey Stoner's first season in MotoGP, when he jumped onto a satellite Honda and showed up many a factory rider.

There are other parallels too. Zarco, like Stoner, does not take the adulation of fans and media very seriously. They both knew how fleeting it was, and were more interested in their own achievements than in how those achievements were received. Neither took media attention very seriously, though Zarco remains unfailingly polite while doing his duty, unlike Stoner, who could sometimes barely conceal his contempt.

Both Zarco and Stoner are incredibly strong-willed, both having grown up in frankly bizarre circumstances. Stoner laboured under constant psychological pressure from his parents, who had effectively placed the family's future on his shoulders at the tender age of fourteen. Zarco lived under the strict regime placed upon him by his manager and

guru, Laurent Fellon, who controlled every aspect of Zarco's life in pursuit of perfection in racing. Both Zarco and Stoner are frank and honest, and invariably tell the unvarnished truth as they see it, rather than the filtered and polished politically correct version spoon fed by PR bods. They are both unique personalities, unlike other riders, and unlike the mass of humanity. They dance to their own beat, for better or for worse. That alone makes them admirable, for it takes great courage to always do what you believe is right, rather than please the crowd.

Can Zarco match the achievements of Stoner? It is a little hard to say. Zarco will be 27 this year, while Stoner entered MotoGP at the tender age of 20. Zarco still has a lot to learn – especially about managing tyres at the end of a race – but he is well on his way to challenging Crutchlow for the title of best satellite rider in MotoGP. Beyond that, who knows? But one thing is clear. The Flying Frenchman is the joker in the pack of MotoGP. Talent will always shine through.









More problems for Alex Rins who flew home early with a broken left arm while Rossi fights on in defiance





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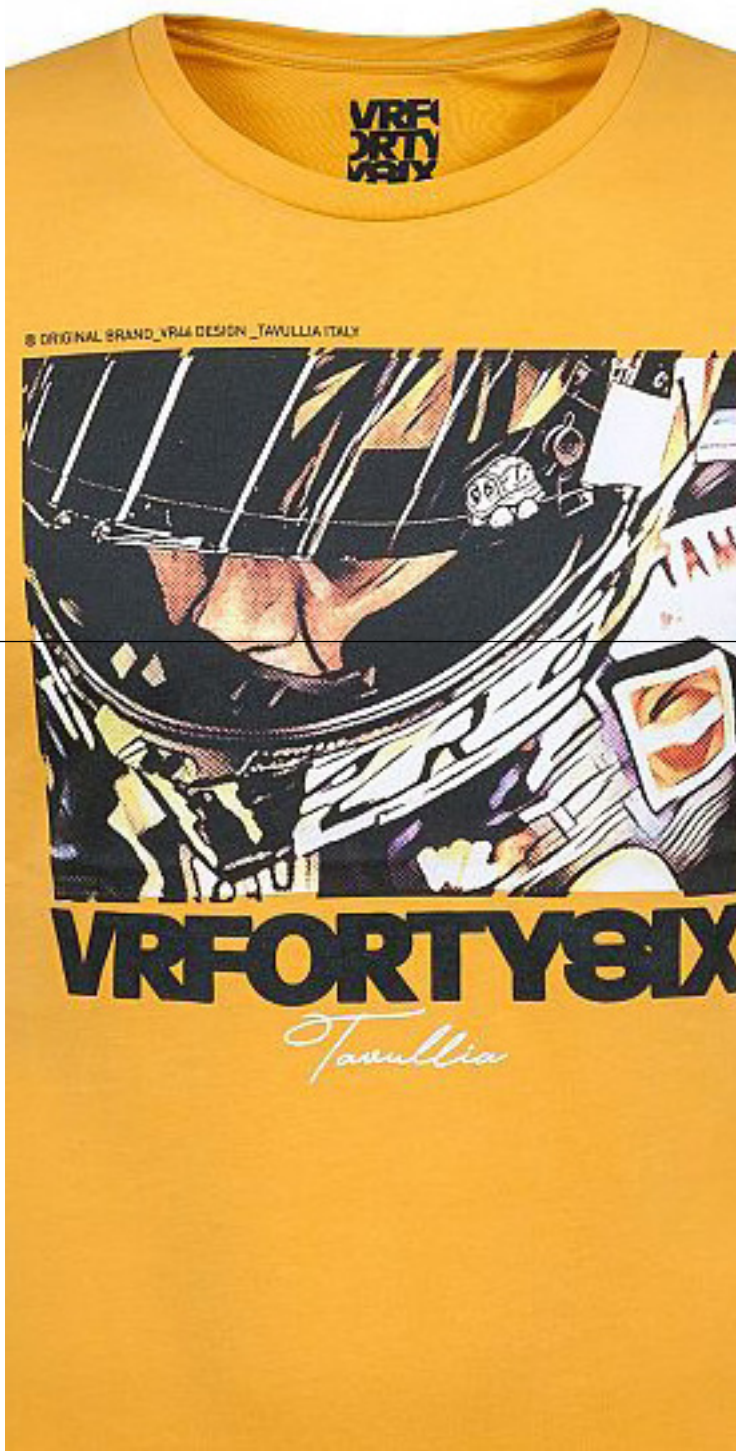




## vr46

If you'd ever like some degree of measurement when it comes to Valentino Rossi's profile and reach around and outside of MotoGP then simply check out his VR46 official merchandise or race-wear apparel operation. The scope is vast and the catalogue is enormous. The designs and products cater for almost every demographic: from the smallest of fans to the most obsessed or the older admirer that perhaps prefers something a little more conservative than a large splash of yellow. There is a focus on race related gear but also some nice looks and styles in the Lifestyle section and it seems that VR46 (with a large stable of other riders also having their merch included in the set-up) deliver to a myriad of countries. The prices are premium – expect to pay more than 20 pounds for most of the t-shirts we have highlighted on this page and in materials from 100% cotton to 'dry tech' fabrics – but comes with the stamp of official gear from the creation process and offices in Tavullia and therefore involves licenced Yamaha and Monster branding as well.





[www.vr46.it](http://www.vr46.it)





CHRISTIAN CRAIG

Photo: HRC Honda / Simon Cudby

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**AMA-SX**

# **SALT LAKE CITY**

**RICE-ECCLES STADIUM · APRIL 22nd**

**450SX winner: Eli Tomac, Kawasaki**

**250SX West Coast winner: Shane McElrath, KTM**



**PIVOTAL  
POINT**



SX SLC









**R**yan Dungey, Eli Tomac. Eli Tomac, Ryan Dungey. The two 450SX riders came into Salt Lake City Supercross, round fifteen of seventeen in the Monster Energy Supercross series, tied in the 450SX points but it kind of didn't feel that way. Tomac, on his Monster Energy Kawasaki KX450F, has been on a hell of a roll lately in the series and ate up Dungey's lead by winning race after race. The tally being eight wins for Tomac and just two for the defending champion. Also with two wins is the now departed due to injury Kenny Roczen and Dungey's teammate on the Red Bull KTM, Marvin Musquin.

So it felt like an inevitable truth that Tomac would be able to beat Dungey in Salt Lake (back on the series schedule for the first time in three years) and take the points lead and he did just that. THAT'S not the surprising thing. What was surprising was the way that he did it.

Tomac came roaring into the first turn almost last place, the victim of a rider next to him flinching on the gate and him going, then having to pull back as the gate dropped. On a pretty basic track, it was hard to see where Eli was going to make up time out there.

And out front, it was Tomac's worst nightmare as Dungey passed RCH Suzuki's Justin Bogle who'd holeshot and Rockstar Husqvarna's Jason Anderson and sprinted away with the lead. Tomac was buried and fighting for his championship life. In fact at one point Musquin put an aggressive pass on Tomac and it looked like Eli might spend all twenty minutes plus one lap main event trying to salvage whatever he can and go into New York next week trying to fight back.

But then Tomac got his groove going and started picking off riders right and left including Musquin. Dungey's lead on the #3 was at it's peak probably around eleven

seconds. Traction not being ideal and a set of whoops that were chewed up beyond belief were not issues for Tomac. It was an incredible ride with Eli seemingly able to put the bike wherever he wanted, whenever he wanted. Slick track...what slick track?

"I was comfy all night," Tomac said after the race in perhaps the understatement of the year. "Our bike's been awesome, especially in this condition. Another race that comes to mind is even Detroit. That place was ice and I was hooking. So same thing here. That sweeper was pretty hard and I was able to go underneath guys, guys that normally go way inside, and I was able to get inside of them. So it was cool."

Tomac was amazing everywhere and took just fourteen laps to get into second place and everyone in the stadium knew where the pass was going to take place. The whoops were Tomac's strength and Dungey's weakness, everyone could all see that. Tomac went at him twice there and got the pass to stick the second time. Looking at the times for the race, the whoops were part of short six-second segment and somehow, incredibly, Tomac was 2.5 seconds faster than anyone else. And almost three seconds faster than Dungey. To go almost 50% faster than anyone else in a six second total segment is some serious speed. It's almost hard to believe really...maybe the scoring transponders were wrong?

Either way, it was amazing and in the end, just two laps later the race was over and Tomac had over six seconds on Dungey. Hard to understand how Dungey, who struggled with the whoops all day, couldn't watch video and adjust his speed but he just could never get comfortable there.

Demoralizing loss for Dungey but one that he had in perspective after the race.



"It's good to get points, but we've got to win. Eli [Tomic] was riding good tonight," said Dungey on the podium. "He caught us, passed us, and that's what it was. There were a lot of positives tonight, but man, I was hoping to get out front and just take it all the way, but it doesn't happen like that all the time. It's a bummer, but we put ourselves out there and came up a little short. I'm really happy with a lot of things, but instead of second place I wish we were one step higher."



One thing that's a bit alarming for Tomic and crew and perhaps something Dungey and KTM can hope for is Tomic's been up and down with his starts yet again. That's always been something that's been a bit of a bugaboo for Eli but in 2017, he's got the best average starting position in the class. We've seen lately in the heats and mains Tomic's dropped off a bit from where he was.

"Of course I can work on it, but I don't know," said Tomic about the starts being hot and cold lately "These last two races have been the bad ones. I came into this round with the best start average. So I don't know. Hopefully it's just a little bad run and we can make it better."

Anderson finished third on the night, Musquin had a great ride in following Tomic through the pack to get fourth and Tomic's teammate Josh Grant had a season best fifth but after-

wards all anyone was talking about was that ride. He was on another level from the best riders in the world and no one who was there that witnessed it could be talked out of believing that.

In the 250SX class it was Monster Pro Circuit's Justin Hill that was the big story with his third place clinching his first professional title and giving the powerful Pro Circuit it's first title in four years which is the longest they've gone without one since forming a team in 1991.

Hill, on his second tour of duty with Payton and the boys, rode cautiously around the track and did what he had to do to get a third. In fact, with second place in the points Aaron Plessinger out front and cruising, it looked like the actual clinching would be held off until the final round in Las Vegas. But then Plessinger cartwheeled his Star Yamaha in the whoops and the title was Hill's.

But the new second place in the points, TLD KTM's Shane McElrath, took advantage of the crash to motor off with another win with his teammate, Mitchell Oldenburg, in second. It was quite a series for both of these riders and they've emerged as title threats in 2018, no doubt about it. Rockstar Husqvarna's Martin Davalos put on a late-race charge that caught up to Hill and briefly passed him but Hill out drag raced Davalos up the finish that clinched the title for him. Hill's been complimentary of his old teammates McElrath and Oldenburg (Hill rode for TLD KTM last year) all year long and it was a bit of a juxtaposition to the all-business 450SX class.

And speaking of that class, we've got a new points leader going on and after Salt Lake City, it's going to take a comeback by Ryan Dungey of epic proportions to enable him to get his fourth 450SX championship. Tomic's been an absolute force for a while now and this past weekend was the perhaps the epicenter of all of that. Wow. What a ride.





SX SLO







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SX SLC

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 Rui  
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# MASTERY AT WORK...

Monster Energy Kawasaki's Eli Tomac put on a quite a show this past weekend in Salt Lake City. He did that two weeks ago in Seattle as well in coming from the back and an 'endo' over the bars to a second but in Seattle, it was explainable because he was actually tripling jumps that others were not. I'm no Gary Bailey but when you jump further than anyone else, that's usually a good way to go faster around a race track.

No, with Tomac getting a terrible start and on a basic track his outlook looked far bleaker than it did in Seattle. The Kawasaki rider couldn't do anything that others couldn't so how was he going to get to the front? Afterwards Tomac admitted that after he saw Ryan Dungey sprinting away, he was calculating how he was going to limit the damage.

"He (Dungey) was in first and I was like, man, he's going to make a big break. I was able to get there up to the front a little bit quicker than I expected," said Tomac. "I was really good in the whoops and the sweeper turn beforehand and that was huge for us, making big chunks of time." But then Tomac got to work and in a ride that will stay with this writer for a while, he started pulling off some amazing passes. The whoop entrance speed was on another level as he wheeled past the first square edged one and got on a plain then got on the gas. The exit speed was something that caught a bunch of riders by surprise as he braked hard and made some contact

with more than a few of them. Tomac's lean angle was road-racing-esque as he seemed to be able to find traction where others couldn't.

An amazing ride all the way to the front and he's your new undisputed 450SX points leader. Who would have thought that when the series was halfway done and Dungey had a 27-point lead after his win in Atlanta? After the first three races we were all writing and talking about what in the heck was wrong with Tomac. He was fading, he wasn't moving forward and it looked like the new timed main event format was working the opposite of what we all thought it would.

What a run he's been on and Salt Lake City was perhaps the finest yet.

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The AMA/FIM met with the team managers this past weekend in Salt Lake City and announced some new rules in the 250SX class to take effect immedi-



By Steve Matthes



ately. The old rule was 135 points scored in a eight race series (or 125 in a seven race series) three times and you were out. Also if you won a title in the 250SX class after you've been in the class for three years, you were out. That was the old rules. The new ones are it's not FOUR years instead of three with scoring the minimum points and no matter what, if you win a title, you get one year to defend it

I mean, why not just suddenly change the rules near the end of a series? One of the reasoning the powers that be made was that this season there were riders like Justin Hill (win the title and he'd be out), Martin Davalos, Joey Savatgy (they were both going to meet the minimum point rule) had contracts coming up and their situations needed to be addressed. But why take a look around at some riders on very powerful teams that are looking like they're going to be out and THEN change the rule? It smacks of high level political maneuvering by the teams that have a self-interest in keeping riders down.

If you're going to make a rule change of this magnitude, make it in the off-season where the perception isn't that you're pandering to certain teams. It's as if the AMA/FIM took a look around three-quarters through the season and realized that the state the sport was that the regional support class needed to keep some stars in it so let's just change what we need to in order to keep people happy.

Maybe next year we'll see another change IF someone important looks like they might point out. In my opinion the 250SX class has ventured so far from what it's supposed to be and was intended to be that right now it's a bit like being half-pregnant.

Rules are adjusted but they're never curing the problem one way or another. Make it like the 250MX class and you can never point out or make it so that the lifers, the riders that don't accomplish anything (because remember, if you succeed in there, it's often the worst thing you can do- ask Malcolm Stewart) and make tons of money get out of there. Right now, the class is doing no one a service and with these new rules, the beat goes on.





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It can be easy to tear through sets of gloves: quite literally. Fly Racing's offerings usually stand up pretty good to the more rigorous of conditions and riding hours and the firm have different levels and standards of product depending on the requirement for a given day. For example motocross riders will look towards the Pro Lite (25 dollars, here in white, red and blue) with its focus on light weight, four-way stretch fabric (and Lycra® finger sidewall for flexibility, comfort and air flow), synthetic single layer palm, silicone finger grips and reinforced double layer thumb. The Lite is cheaper at 22 dollars and with a new softer feel but without the four-way stretch or the Embossed ultra-light neoprene cuffs. The Lite Windproof (25 dollars) will suffice for the last cold shocks of Spring and Fly say the garments have 'lightweight windproof fabric on the back of hands, fingers, and fourchettes'. To see the full range of colours and designs and use more 'handy' product then try: [www.flyracing.com](http://www.flyracing.com)











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MX

# GRAND PRIX OF EUROPE

VALKENSWAARD · APRIL 23rd · Rnd 6 of 19

MXGP winner: Gautier Paulin, Husqvarna

MX2 winner: Pauls Jonass, KTM





MXGP EUROPE



By Adam Wheeler  
Photos by Ray Archer

# PAULIN BACK IN THE FRAME



**G**autier Paulin was celebrating heartily in Valkenswaard but he might not be the only one satisfied with what was going on around him currently in MXGP. With Tony Cairoli's attention-grabbing flight last week in Italy creating plenty of 'hype' - as the Sicilian himself labelled it - and the intense and entertaining scrapping for podium places in Holland last weekend MXGP is very hot; even to the degree that the cold wind that perturbed the Eurocircuit south of Eindhoven last weekend could not deter attention away from two gripping motos in the premier class that made the thirty minute and two lap durations feel like half.

Cairoli was brilliant again to rebound from an adverse set of conditions in the first race and blurred vision after sand entered his goggles to put on a showcase of sand riding in the second. He was as uncatchable as MX2 teammate Pauls Jonass after securing his ravenously desired holeshot.



Paulin had little answer but his strength on the Rockstar Energy Husqvarna and unwavering pace across a track that churned and surprised by-the-lap was the backbone of his first overall triumph since his sole success with HRC at the same circuit in 2015.

Those were the bearers of the chequered flags but the likes of Evgeny Bobryshev, Jer-

emy Van Horebeek, Tim Gajser and Romain Febvre also had their say and chipped into a contest that was unpredictable across a fast and choppy terrain. By the second moto the downhill turn 5 (one of just two descents on an otherwise flat topography) looked nothing short of punishing and front suspension settings, handling and upper body acumen was pushed to the fore in this particular place; especially as it was also a valid overtaking spot when attacked with abandon.

At one stage the top five were split by just five seconds and the protagonists paid for any mistakes: Febvre, Gajser, Bobryshev in that bunch and the otherwise electric Van Horebeek slowing in the final third of moto2 with stomach cramps.

And then there was Herlings. The seven year dominator of Valkenswaard and probably - somewhere in the back of his mind - wishing he could face his sixth MXGP with his 250 SX-F was using his 'backyard' as a yardstick for how the rest of a difficult maiden season in MXGP could turn out if the magic in the sand did not appear. Herlings did not have the speed for Cairoli or Paulin but he visibly grew in confidence during the first moto with traces of the sand skills that made him such a scourge of the surface for seven years in MX2. He was better in the second and there was evident relief on the podium afterwards. Jeffrey tried to talk up his chances of being able to target victory in the post-race melee with the press, but this was an important stride towards the upper echelon of the class; of which a moto finish of fourth position had been his previous best.

MXGP fizzed in Holland, and fans at a busy circuit on Saturday were given a preview of what was to come in a first dose of the to-ing-and-fro-ing and general intensity that is brewing in the division. The battling and pace on Sunday produced the type of scenes that prompted the thought 'I hope it









lasts...' and thankfully the group at the front remained tight. It only increased the admiration for the conditioning and the sheer will of this crop of talent to explore their limits.

Boundaries were found by Red Bull KTM's Jorge Prado in MX2: quite literally. The sixteen year old Spaniard's season continues to bounce with alarming profundity: the disappointment of Qatar, the elation of Argentina, the rough motos of Mexico and the euphoria of victory in Italy. Now he came back down to earth with another bump. Well, two actually. On the same soft roller that opens the lap Prado crashed out of fourth place

in the first race and then spectacularly launched near to the crowd after taking the holeshot in the second through losing the back end of the KTM. 'I was unlucky this weekend and I crossed off all my possibilities,' he said before pausing and adding 'I was also lucky in some ways.'

Jonass' eyes may have been widened by the second get-off that matched some of his own YouTube dismounts for the spectacular but it hardly rattled the Latvian who marches into his home Grand Prix in two weeks with a 50% win ratio in 2017 and three shut-outs to boot.





A close chase to Jonass in the first moto was cancelled out by a suspected knee injury early in the second (a similar scenario for Adam Sterry also). Seva Brylyakov – fourth in race one – also pulled out with a shoulder problem that will be analysed with MRI scans as OTOR heads to digitisation. Thomas Covington was ditched off the FC250 Husqvarna approaching the finish line jump in the second outing; ‘I thought if Febvre could do it then so could I’ he smiled describing the bent state of his handlebars and in reference to the former MXGP World Champion’s memorable performance in Italy in 2015, but pulled out after one lap.

The events of Valkenswaard seemed like another click on the ratchet for MXGP. Paulin, Herlings and Van Horebeek upped their level to the point where they should be troubling the axis of Gajser and Cairoli (both with two wins each) that is beginning to head into a potential title duel. There is still more to come from the likes of Febvre and Monster Energy Kawasaki’s Clement Desalle and the strength and bravery of Suzuki’s Arminas Jasikonis should also not be discounted after he finally took a seat at the card table.

Kegums and more powdery soil and sharp bumps next.

Suzuki’s Jeremy Seewer made an important result to keep distance with #41 in the standings but Kemea Yamaha’s Benoit Paturel lamented his starts to only finish seventh and miss the podium for the fifth time. It was teammate Brent Van Doninck who finally seized his moment for a second career rostrum. Paturel, who was so feisty at Qatar for the championship-opener, is badly in need of a first moto or race win to revive his stock and play for the MX2 crown. He is currently 69 points adrift. LRT’s Julien Lieber was also frustrated in Holland.











Jose Butron gets sandy (above left), Stefan Everts (left) almost ready to smile for the first time in 2017 with Arminas Jasikonis' performance. Max Nagl (this page) is still in search of starts despite recent tests with the IceOne crew



Jeffrey Herlings would not have foreseen a wait until Valkenswaard for his first MXGP podium...but then also wouldn't have counted on a pre-season injury to wreck an immediate title bid in 2017. The big question now for the 22 year old is whether he can keep it all going...







A shoulder problem for Seva Brylyakov put paid to another podium shot while Julien Lieber will have to monitor a knee problem that ended his second moto





It's hard to tell what was more impressive at the first Monster Energy Media Event of the season that took place within the Indoor Montana Snow centre directly opposite the Eurocircuit: Jeremy Van Horebeek attempting a jump on his snowboard, Romain Febvre (intentionally) skiing both backwards and forwards down the short run or Vsevolod Brylyakov (whose parents were both Pro biathletes) also cutting the small amount of powder and needing to be told to stop. Understandably some concerned team staff looked on, but the hesitancy of the riders soon melted into a type of giddy enthusiasm. It was tricky to say who'd triumph in a downhill race such was the proficiency on display but Darian Sanayei certainly had the better of Brent Van Doninck in a sledge race – that admittedly looked scarier than the board or skis. Clement Desalle took the sensible option and joined the rest of the Monster Energy Kawasaki team in cutting through the off-piste BBQ.







Livia Lancelot may have been the first lady to enter the MX2 class but Kiara Fontanesi jumped at the chance to be the second by riding for the Spanish Ausio Team with a late call-up to replace Jorge Zaragoza in Holland. The former multi WMX Champion rode the Spaniard's YZ250F with her suspension fitted for the first time in practice on Saturday and was facing an uphill task on the flat Dutch sand. Not only had the Italian been unable to refine her own sand settings but had focussed on hard-pack riding in recent weeks in preparation for the second round of WMX at Trentino seven days previously, which she had won. 'I was really happy for the opportunity because it has always been my dream to one day race in MX2 and everything moved really fast!' she said. 'We only had confirmation on Thursday night so we didn't have time to try the bike for the sand...but it was a chance I had to take because I am 23 this year. It was a race quite far from my next Grand Prix and is one of the toughest but also one of my favourite tracks.' Predictably 'Fonta' was tackling long odds at gaining points and her lap-times were some twenty seconds down on winner Pauls Jonass – she was also negotiating longer motos compared to WMX – but ended a demanding and personally rewarding day with a smile. 'It is great experience for me, and to pick up even more information. I knew it would be really tough but it was valuable and made me 'grow up' a lot.'



## cairolì, that race and the re-establishment of an old order...

I can vividly remember watching Tony Cairoli scrub the finish line jump at Trentino in a manner that harked back to his flamboyant MX2 pomp and raise his head to look further up the track at the disappearing Tim Gajser. I thought 'no way mate'. He might have just taken sixth or seventh position at the time and his chances of catching and passing the likes of Paulin, Herlings, Desalle and Bobryshev looked remote at mid-race distance. Nice try Tony.

Obviously he did it. One exciting aspect of the fifth round of MXGP that almost matched the level of the 31 year old Sicilian's defiant performance was observing the crowd visibly rise in stature and noise with his progress: it was the sort of scene and emotion at a home Grand Prix that as sports fans and writers that you hanker for, and only occurs now and again: Everts at Namur in '06, Pourcel at St Jean D'Angely in 2008, Searle at Matterley Basin in '12, Philippaerts at Faenza in '08 are examples that come to mind. Cairoli is not the only one that can feed from the surge of 'power' that comes from the synchronisation of desire and expression of will.

Tony has been deservedly feted for the scenes he created at Pietramurata and his GoPro highlights reel will remain one of the 'must watch' videos of this long 2017 campaign. I'm grateful to him because my first instinct over the last seven-eight years when asked the question "best rider you've ever seen?" has involved a very strong urge to say the #222.

Yes, I've witnessed Stefan Everts in his feet-on-the-pegs absolute pomp, the irrepressibility of Ricky Carmichael and wowed at the blur trackside of Ryan Villopoto at the Budds Creek Nations in '07 but I've also seen virtually all of Tony Cairoli's Grand Prix career (even his best attempts at the Bercy Supercross). I've seen a rider that was a master of the holeshot, the come-back, the occasion (from flimsily attended Grands Prix to the pressure of the Nations) a 250, 350 and 450, the mud, the hard-pack and (amazingly for an Italian) the sand. I've marvelled at victories that were seemingly lost and appearances after personal bereavement where racing and riding were clearly forms of a release. I've seen him wide-eyed at the weight of fans bending the KTM awning fence to get a bit closer and also with a look of anguish, slumped in his chair in South Africa 2008 as the knowledge that a left knee injury was a dreaded ligament tear and his first major setback.

I'm glad that Tony commented that 2016 was the worst of his career, despite finishing as runner-up in the world championship. The rider that would lead motos and be swallowed by rivals like Tim Gajser was not the Cairoli I knew and remembered: the skinny livewire of a racer that scrubbed, whipped and downturned his way through MX2 and then matured to become a versatile accumulator of titles on a bigger bike. In a way it was a relief that he came out with such style and verve in Qatar in February to 'announce' his return.

Race fans can become bored or unmoved by serial winners – just ask any follower of F1 and although people now look at Valentino Rossi with the kind of tinted specs that would satisfy the kookiest of 1960s hippies, I'm sure there were plenty that wanted to see his MotoGP reign ended in the early 00s – but I'm convinced they love a come-back.





"I haven't watched it again...but it is great for motocross to have such hype," the man himself said at Valkenswaard last weekend. "It doesn't matter if it was me or someone else; it was just nice to have all that attention on one race and it became something bigger than it was. It's wasn't a championship [deciding] race. But it was important to have that hype and hopefully we'll have more – not like that [for me] because it was very tough!"

Cairolì dared the rest of the Grand Prix elite to match his skill range and peak consistency for the better part of four seasons and the glut of ability in the premier class today came as a consequence of the Italian and his ever-present crew. Riders had to analyse and up-their game to Cairolì's level or it was pointless considering even a thought of the great prize.





A motocross rider is shown from the waist down, leaning forward on a dirt track. The rider is wearing a black and yellow boot with the number '50' on it. The motorcycle is a black and white KTM FC250. The background is a blurred scene of a motocross race with other riders and spectators. A large black banner with white text is visible in the background. The text on the banner is partially obscured but appears to be 'KTM'. The rider is on a dirt track, and the ground is dark and muddy. The overall scene is dynamic and action-oriented.

Thomas Covington was firmly on the gas at Valkenswaard but a second race tumble damaged the FC250 sufficiently to end his day









GOLDENHOFF





CAIROLÌ

# ANSER

17.5 SYNCRON



# IN NEED OF EXTRA...

A recurring motif in Grand Prix at the moment involves the level of competition. Almost anyone and everyone connected with the premier class are commenting on just how tough it is to succeed in MXGP.

Before his revival at Valkenswaard at the weekend, I asked Gautier Paulin about all the quotes and words from his peers alluding to the virtually desperate need to obtain a good start in each and every moto these days. Was this because of the tracks or the quality around him? 'Both' came the assertive reply followed by an explanation that every rider is now hitting absolute peaks of preparation; there is not much 'give' anywhere.

Well poised to offer a perspective on MXGP in his first year and perhaps the finest example of how MX2 is funnelling the best and brightest onto 450s is Jeffrey Herlings. Along with Max Anstie, Arnaud Tonus (essentially swapping places with an athlete like Dylan Ferrandis who would have been bound for MXGP but instead transferred to the U.S.) Herlings is a rookie in the category that has

also gained talent and names like Febvre, Gajser, Guillod, Coldenhoff, Van Horebeek, Searle, Paulin in the last half decade and will welcome Jeremy Seewer in 2018.

'I'm very surprised about how everybody is so much on the limit,' the Dutchman said at his home GP. 'I think it has been a lot of years since the competition was so strong and in each timed practice everything is so close together. There are so many potential winners and it is great for our sport... but tough for us riders. It is so close that every small detail starts to count. It is going to be a long season.'

We've spouted the statistics before and the fact that MXGP now boasts an unprecedented number of riders with Grand Prix winning or podium experience. Almost all of the names on the OAT list know what it

is like to run at the front or lead at the highest level. MXGP has been building up to this degree of parity and with the standard of race machinery also teeming.

The urgency surrounding race starts has therefore increased. As Paulin claims, this is due to the diversity of race tracks that will pitch the inviting speed of Argentina alongside with the compact hard-pack nature of Arco di Trento and the rough sand of Valkenswaard. There is little doubt that the new metal grid in start gates has played a role. Those with a particular skill in preparing their slot for a decent launch have lost that 'small detail' that Herlings was talking about. Some still haven't quite optimised their set-up for the mesh. The first four Grands Prix of the season saw a variety in the flooring riders would find once they pushed their bike to the line. With Arco and Valkenswaard now in the books, the MXGP elite have had two tastes of the same panels that will now follow the majority of the calendar.



By Adam Wheeler



Whether a track has one decent racing line (as was the case in Italy and also Mexico for the most part) or could involve several, athletes are aware that anything outside the top ten on the first lap seriously limits the chance for podium potential. I know Shaun Simpson was having difficulty digesting the fact that making the difference to other riders through the sand was freakishly uncommon at the weekend and as Herlings says: 'I didn't expect these [MXGP] guys to be so fast and it is like all-out war from the moment the gate drops to the finish flag'.

Working, aiming and striving for a good start is by no means nothing new, but seeing the dismay and hearing the increased frustration that it is not happening for some and results are being severely affected is becoming more prevalent in the paddock: especially with KTM and Honda consistently outperforming the rest into the first corner.

As Herlings says the fact that MXGP has levelled out and riders with the skill and pedigree to deliver the goods are still working and testing to find solutions six GPs into the season is a big 'win' for followers of the sport. Four different victors in six rounds points to a fascinating term ahead.







# 100%

100%'s award-winning website is always worth perusing now and again...if only for some fantastic imagery of their bank of athletes. Flicking through the Products section can also throw up some nice surprises.

The company sell three models of sock from Moto (long profile for full boot comfort and with ten designs and also in Youth sizes) to Performance (lower cut and seven schemes) and then Lifestyle (six colours). There is something for every use and several versions come with the 100% logo embroidered and – of course – the company's normally sharp attention to design and aesthetic. You won't find better looking socks in moto...





[www.ride100percent.com](http://www.ride100percent.com)









# POR FIN

*(at last...)*

Catching the latest teenage sensation in MXGP as the milestones begin to fall

By Adam Wheeler, Photos by Ray Archer



**D**ammit Spain. Not content with the world's fastest/best motorcycle athletes in Road racing, Rally, Trial, Enduro (even honourable names in F1 and WRC) the Iberian Peninsula now have a motocrosser worthy to join the ranks.

Jorge Prado has been a large blip on the sport's radar for several years and long before his voice recently broke as a fresh-faced sixteen year old. Secured as a junior by KTM and fast-tracked Herlings/Roczen-style through a 125 programme, a year on a 250 and to the point where a Grand Prix debut resulted in a phenomenal podium finish in the sand of Assen, Holland last year, Prado recently became just the second Spanish Grand Prix winner in the history of the sport and the first in MX2. Last week the Pietramurata circuit in Trentino heard the

and his younger sister became trilingual and submerged in the Belgium school system. 65cc World and 125cc European Championships were bagged before EMX250 wins and MX2 beckoned by way of a stint in the USA in 2015 where Prado's capabilities on the KTM test tracks drew plenty of attention. New contract inked and #61 had a trajectory planned including one of the most coveted factory seats in MX2.

'He was always very open and very passionate,' Team Manager Dirk Gruebel says. 'He is naturally gifted and always seems to have fun and it is good to see: not every kid has that. They usually carry passion from their Dad or something of their surroundings. Jorge is not like that. He is a very special character.'

***"I WAS RIDING A LOT OF TRIALS AND I THINK THIS HELPED WITH TECHNIQUE AND RIDING THE BIKE WELL BECAUSE IT IS LESS ABOUT POWER AND MORE HANDLING. I FIND IT HELPS ME NOW IN SITUATIONS WHERE I CAN MAKE A SMALL DIFFERENCE..."***

Marcha Real national anthem for the first time this decade (the last was Jonathan Barragan on home soil in 2009, also on a KTM but in MXGP...then MX1).

The rise has been anticipated and eagerly awaited: Prado must have done more interviews than any of his MX2 peers before he was legally allowed to apply for a driver's licence such was his profile and level of hype surrounding his abilities. His entire family uprooted from his native Galicia to Belgium where his parents chased new jobs and Jorge

Prado made an emphatic statement at Assen last August (he actually attempted the Belgian Grand Prix a month earlier but could not get through practice due to a shoulder injury) and the winter of 2016 meant a serious step up the professional ladder by finding a trainer for the first time in the form of German Stephan Nuesser.

Jorge seems to fly around the paddock at 100mph and with the typical exuberance of an individual that still doesn't have to worry too much about shaving.



He has a demeanour that screams 'fun' and even a face that wants to wear a permanent smile. Watching his interactions with others it is clear his parents have brought him up with the right values and even if his childhood can be deemed unusual compared to many others, his life centres around a school timetable (he went straight from the Grand Prix of Europe at Valkenswaard to the classroom). This is not the first interview we've done but it is the first talk with Jorge where we both know – along with thousands of others – that the kid is going to travel quite far and stands on the precipice of genuine stardom...

**It's your first GP year and – being honest – there have been moments of brilliance but others when we remember you're a rookie at this level...**

Winning the Italian championship was a big thing for me in the pre-season and even things like at Ottobiano for the final round I made a holeshot against the 450s and battled against them for a top five. So I had a lot of confidence and had a good feeling going to Qatar but then I dipped mentally. I felt like I had to win and when I was fourth I wasn't happy. I needed some perspective but in Indonesia we had that crazy, muddy race. Finally Argentina was really good and to finish second was my best result so far, especially because I had been feeling sick and on Saturday I was pretty sore. In Mexico I didn't like the track or enjoy the ride. Overall I think it has been going pretty good.

**How do you get confidence? Results or feeling?**

I think it is more about feeling. The fastest guy doesn't always win and so far this year I've see quite a few guys who are quick...but also out of control.











## JORGE PRADO

Sometimes I have seen guys ahead of me in a race with their feet and legs everywhere. I always stay in control and never go over the limit. This is really important because injuries are such a setback. I did not expect the guys here to go so crazy. They want to win, so they give everything and more...I'm just trying to learn.

**Is it hard to know your limit though? You can see Pauls or Jeremy or Benoit pushing and know you have to match them...**

Yes! In Mexico for example I knew that if I pushed a bit more then there was a big chance of crashing. It is my in hand! Sometimes I want to go faster but it doesn't let me. There are times where you feel confident right away and you know you can do well – like in Argentina – so I went for it.

**It must have been one of the busiest and most important off-season and winter periods for you...**

Yes, although it wasn't really a big push for me because I have trained well before and I'm a good swimmer. My Dad and I did some things but I'd usually go cycling on my own and following my own programme. I started working with Stephan Nuesser for 2017 and I felt that the training was totally different. We always do different things. Before I'd always kept quite 'routine': I'd take the bicycle or swim and it'd always been for two-two and a half hours. Now we mix it up, involve more sprints and variations and I can feel it helping me on the track. So my fitness is much better and my intensity on the track. We also do bike specific exercises.

**Do you feel like you are still growing? I guess you measure and record everything...**



An example is my shoulders. I thought it was an area I needed to build up and be stronger and we could have done a big change but it was also something that has to happen slowly. I was made aware that the strength would come... and I can feel it if I compare myself to past months. I saw Stephan working with Bobby [Evgeny Bobryshev] and it looked professional. We had also heard some good things so we started talking and asked about his ideas. We really like him and his professionalism. There are some guys that make you do the same workouts as when they were racing! Stefan is always trying to improve and draw out the best of me. I like that he is always looking for new techniques.

## Such as?

Different to say without giving away the work we are doing...

## I know he's quite into his nutrition...

It is not an area we have touched too much. He says – and I'm with him on this – that for motocross you don't need to diet. You don't need to be a set weight. You just need to eat healthily – not French fries everyday! We use protein shakes for recovery and you really feel those. I hadn't used those before and I'd be pretty tired from one day to the next.

'Jorge was at a high level,' says Sport Scientist Nuesser; a man who has worked with Josh Coppins, Bobryshev, Stephen Sword and a number of other younger German riders. 'From an endurance point of view he was already pretty good; there was some space to improve but it was high. In aspects of strength we had to work on details because that was a weak point. When he was young he was

quite an ambitious swimmer and so putting the hours in is not an issue and hard work is normal. You never need to motivate him to train and at that age it is something unique; most up-and-coming riders don't see the need to do high quality physical training.'

'I think he has the aptitude for good endurance fitness. Some riders have that genetic disposition and it is a good base,' he adds.

**It seems so far that your bike has been going faster than you: there was the step to the 125 and then on the 250 in less than a year and now MX2 after just one term at EMX. It is almost like your body has been playing catch-up. Were there any doubts about the training and the right way to do it?**





## JORGE PRADO

Stephan is in Germany for a couple of days a week but then is in Valkenswaard for the rest of the time so it is really easy for me to do a gym or cycling session with him in Holland; only ten minutes from my house. The communication is great and we talk almost every day. He knows my feelings. About the training: I'm still in school so everything is taking time. I can only do one session a day when it should be two for progress. I feel a lot of difference every year when the summer starts and I suddenly have more time.

Nuesser is handling a different kind of athlete. The work with Coppins, Bobryshev, Paul Cooper and Sword were with riders hitting the peak of their form and fitness and now Prado represents a project on a different point of the scale; as you'd expect from a GP novice the work

is not only centred on conditioning. 'It's true that he was always quite small for the class he is riding and that formed his riding style, especially on hard-pack and now we're trying to change this,' Nuesser says. 'In the past he used a technique because he was not strong enough to control the bike in certain lines. That's why he has this very smooth and fluid style but sometimes he also needs to be a bit more aggressive into lines and sections and we've had problems on certain tracks: you can see that between Mexico and the win in Italy.'

This leads us into Prado's weaknesses. The kid is already an accomplished starter and the marriage with the works 250 SX-F is a devastating one out of the gate but there are still plenty of aspects to work on.





'I'd say Jorge's weakness at the moment is to fight,' opines Gruebel. 'If it is a hard, hard struggle – like he had some stomach cramps in Mexico – then we are reminded he is still a kid. He needs to grow more and learn to endure until the end, but it is a process.'

'When things are not going the way he wants then he needs more mental support,' offers Nuesser. 'It was difficult for the first two GPs because he'd had won the Italian Championship and beaten most of his competitors. He had high expectations going to Qatar and it didn't go the way he expected but I thought it was a learning process: I did not see him riding for the championship in his first season.'

that age this is kinda special,' comments Nuesser. 'He watches and wants and listens. There is a lot of communication and discussion and it is motivating.'

Like Seewer and Gajser previously, Prado is combining competition at the highest level of his sport with an obligation to the classroom. This brings about practical difficulties. Nuesser: 'He can only do one session a day and is in school until 3 or 4. If he has riding days then he can stop earlier. We cannot do as much as if he was a full-time professional but it's important he finishes school and it's good for him personally. Obviously it is also difficult to do that and I don't know how he can handle it next year depending on the goals for 2018 but I appreciate his reasoning because many others would take the easy road and say 'I'm a factory rider...' He chooses this by himself.'

**“GRUEBEL: HE JUST HAS THAT GIFT, AND DOESN'T GET STRESSED OUT. HE KNOWS WHEN HE IS FOCUSED THAT HE WILL TAKE THE HOLESHOT. HE IS PLANNING IT AND NOT EVERY KID CAN DO THAT.”**

'He has the talent but at that age Jeffrey and Roczen were harder,' adds Gruebel. 'They were winning races at fifteen and every week in the top five. Jeffrey never really rode the 125 and went straight to the 250, Jorge is still a little up and down. He is getting there.'

'It is important to remember he is learning and from my side you can work with him on a high and professional level and I would compare it already in terms of intensity, the relationship and the type of training with Josh [Coppins] and at

**So, how long left at school?**

Three more years. There are sport schools that have different programmes and schedules but mine is quite normal!

**That's going to be more and more tricky...nineteen GPs this year for example...**

Yeah, more and more difficult. If you want to improve then you need to dedicate that time...and a lot of my hours go towards schooling. If I stopped next year then I'd still home study. It is good to have that knowledge [qualification].





## JORGE'S GRAN TRIPLE: NO.1 STYLE

*"I just ride my bike. I enjoy it! I watch videos of other riders – like Ken Roczen – and try to see the positive things they are doing with the bike and their position. I tried to imitate...but in my way. I like my style but I think you can also see a rider that doesn't like to go over that limit and someone who knows that he can do better in other sections of the track. Sometimes I'll think 'argh, I can give a little bit more gas there'. It is good to have that cushion for improvement. I think if you can ride the bike well then it is another way for people to like you: I think it is another way to bring people into the sport."*





**But you are not a 'top ten guy'. OK, anything can happen in this sport, but you are a factory rider with the world at your feet...**

Here, in this team, I don't think they like results out of the top ten so you have to fight for your spot and justify your place. Making top fives is important. OK, for me it is a learning year but there is still that expectation to make it. I know that.

**How much do you weigh?**

65 kilos.

**Is that easy to keep?**

I don't think the weight matters that much. Look at [Thomas Kjer] Olsen; he is very tall and always top five in the starts. A lot of people that cannot start well tend to say they are too heavy or too tall. I think it is more about confidence and the feeling you have with the engine and the bike. It is that whole relationship with the shifting, the clutch, the gas: there are so many things going on and not just reaction time. I start well, and not just because I am light. In fact in some other parts of the track I have problems because of my weight, as the suspension does not work the same. If I had ten more kilos then I'd be heavier, have more traction and the bike would be moving less.

Gruebel is best placed to have an opinion as to why Prado is so swift away from the line and having optimised the #61 race bike to help make those holeshots happen. 'He just has that gift, and doesn't get stressed out. He knows when he is focussed that he will take the holeshot. He is planning it and not every kid can do that. Max Nagl had that ability, Tony Cairoli does. There is some 'programme' running when they enter the

gate. There is a procedure and it clicks. Jorge just knows and believes he can make a top three start. When we began with tests in the winter it took him only a couple of starts to get it. In the Italian championship he won the starts against the 450s. He is always with the right torque, the bike accelerates and he is gone.'

**Feeling seems to be such a vital asset to steering a**





**motorcycle as quickly as possible – you see that in MotoGP especially. Can you describe how you get that feeling? Is it just hours and hours of riding?**

I think it is something you are born with. In terms of development then I was riding a lot of trials and I think this helped with technique and riding the bike well because it is less about power and more your handling. I find it helps me now in situations where I can make a small difference. You need to like sport a lot to get to the point where you take [onboard] everything and feel everything. That you enjoy it so much that you feel any little changes.

**Any regrets that you didn't pursue road racing a bit more? [Prado was earmarked by talent spotters for the asphalt after some tests]. You broke your leg and then had those injuries at Matterley Basin: some tough times. You could be in Moto3 right now...**

There were times when I thought about it...but not from a racing perspective but more daydreaming about where I would be and what I'd be doing; how different my life would be. I would still be able to ride my motocross bike...[pauses]. No, I love motocross. I don't want to say MotoGP riders cannot ride a motorcycle but when you see some of them on a dirt bike...! You look around you here in MXGP and think 'these guys at this level of motocross should

be able to go there and win...' but it is never that easy. A different sport, totally. In a way it seems that riders who think they won't make it in motocross go to MotoGP!

**What's the next step?**

Supercross. I would like to do another year here and maybe, hopefully, go there as world champion.

**What if I could rip up your contract now and write a new one with KTM allowing you to choose exactly what you want to do for 2018: what would you say?**

I think I would stay here. At least one more year. I want to see what my level is like at the end of 2017. It is not like I would go to the U.S. and get easy wins. This is all good experience for me.

## JORGE'S GRAN TRIPLE: NO.2 BEING SPANISH

*"Success came pretty quick; it was only three years ago I was riding 85s and people were talking about me back then. I like to go to Spain a lot now and I enjoy it more and more. The people at the races cheer me a lot and that gives you energy. I think the Spanish fans really respond when they see someone doing well."*





## JORGE'S GRAN TRIPLE: NO.3 STARTS

*"I actually began making good starts in my first year on the 85s. I got a lot of confidence then and developed a technique then that many other riders don't use or have. It helps a lot. I am pretty focussed on everything in the gate: it is not only about the reaction but also the feeling with the engine. I think you can make a lot of metres out of the gate like that. My reaction times are OK – not the best – but when my rear wheel touches the dirt that's where I start to make the difference. I'm a pretty good starter I would say but any over-confidence means that you lose that focus."*



















'On-track Off-road' is a free, bi-weekly publication for the screen focussed on bringing the latest perspectives on events, blogs and some of the very finest photography from the three worlds of the FIM Motocross World Championship, the AMA Motocross and Supercross series' and MotoGP.

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